

Swimming Champ Saves Downed Australian Flier

HEADQUARTERS, 13TH AAF, PHILIPPINES, April 14—The swimming skill of a former Drake university intercollegiate champion, Capt. Louie Goldberg, Des Moines, Iowa, now flight surgeon of a 13th AAF rescue group, paid off recently when he rescued a drowning Australian flier from pounding waters in the Southwest Pacific.

After saving the airman, Captain Goldberg and other members of his Catalina crew almost lost their lives in the attempt to take off, but eventually made it after taxiing for five hours through storm-lashed seas.

The rescue crew, headed by Capt. Gerard F. Wientjes, San Antonio,

make a safe water landing with waves running six feet high. If the floating airman had been on a raft the Catalina would not have chanced the dangerous landing at that time, but their plight prompted the decision to attempt the rescue.

Crewmen took their crash-landing stations and prayed as the plane dropped down. When it hit the water the nose buried under the waves, quickly bouncing into the air. After three terrific bounces, the "Cat" settled on the rough water, 50 yards from the Aussie floating on the table.

LOSES HOLD

As the plane taxied to within 20 yards, the Australian maneuvered



CAPTS. L. GOLDBERG (LEFT), GERARD F. WIENTJES
Flight surgeon and pilot of plane rescuing Australian fliers.

the pilot, took off from a Netherlands East Indies base in answer to a distress call from an Australian fighter plane, which reported that a Beaufighter had crashed into the sea 150 miles away, and that two men were afloat on a raft.

OIL SLICK SPOTTED

After a flight of an hour or two, the Catalina crew spotted an oil slick and debris floating on the water, and discovered one of the fliers floating on a tire and wheel that had broken off the Beaufighter as it hit the water. The other Aussie was hanging to a tiny navigator's table, about half a mile away.

Captain Wientjes anxiously watched the heavy sea below, knowing that it was almost impossible to

his floating table close by.

Thinking he had a one-hand grip on the nose of the plane, he let go of the table. In an instant, due to his exhausted condition, he lost his hold, a huge wave came in over the plane and washed him away. He shouted that he couldn't swim, and quickly disappeared. The next time the crew spotted him, he was 50 yards away.

Captain Goldberg stripped off his clothes, dived into the raging sea, fought his way to the drowning soldier, shedding his life preserver rather than have it handicap his swimming. He grabbed the unconscious Aussie as he was disappearing and towed him to the "Cat."

The engines were switched on and the plane taxied in the direction of the other Australian, while Captain Goldberg worked with his patient.

The second drifting airman had disappeared, but suddenly the co-pilot, Lieut. Arthur J. Carothers, Orbisonia, Pa., spotted him as he appeared on the top of a huge swell. The plane was tossing like a cork, almost out of control. The occasional flash of the Aussie's mirror directed the pilot and soon he was pulled aboard.

SEA ROUGHER

The sea by now was rougher and waves were eight feet high, breaking over the top of the plane and pouring water into the bow. The radio men and engineer bailed frantically.

The pilot and co-pilot decided a takeoff under these conditions would be suicide, so the only thing to do was look for smoother water. Lieut. Richard W. Deane, navigator, of Springfield, Mass., located an island 25 miles away and the plane started its long water journey through the

roughest sea any of the men had ever seen.

It took five hours to cover the 25 miles, bucking the pounding waves all the way. The engines were stopped eight times to enable the ballers to catch up. Water was up to the rudder pedals in the front of the plane.

Captain Wientjes said afterward: "I was ready on two occasions to give up the ship, when I saw her nose go under. I thought we were gonners."

SITUATION DESPERATE

The situation became so desperate a radio was sent out asking that a rescue boat be sent for them. The plane seemed doomed. It would have taken five hours for help to arrive, so the men prayed and "passed the buckets."

Finally they reached the lee side of the tiny island and made a take-off at dusk. No sooner were they airborne than they encountered a thunder storm and upon arrival at their base found the landing strip closed in.

Five huge airdrome searchlights were turned on, but the pilot couldn't see them. A radio bearing was flashed to the plane, and no sooner had this been received than the ship's radio conked out. Coming in on the bearing the pilot finally dropped low enough to see the search beams and made a safe landing in spite of the tropical down-pour.

Ambulances rushed the group to a portable hospital where all received medical attention.

400 FLIERS SAVED

The 13th AAF rescue specialists have saved more than 400 fliers lost at sea. This rescue chalked up the 59th man whom Pilot Wientjes has brought back alive.

The other members of the crew were: Staff Sgt. William A. Allman, radio operator, Tiffin, Ohio; Sgt. Christopher A. Pavone, radar operator and gunner, Rochester, N. Y., and Tech. Sgt. Michael J. Spisak, engineer, Lakewood, Ohio.